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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000052

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - ANTI-OPPOSITION ALLIANCES APPEAR TO GAIN MOMENTUM
IN SOMALI REGIONS

REF: 09 NAIROBI 2032; 09 NAIROBI 2545

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On January 10 pro-TFG clan and Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ) forces wrested control of much of Beledweyne town from Hisbul Islam (HI) and al-Shabaab. By late evening, following day-long sporadic but fierce fighting, clan and ASWJ-allied militia brought much of Beledweyne under their control. The alliance on January 11 thwarted an early morning HI counterattack. (Note: Control of Beledweyne changed hands between clan militia sympathetic to the TFG and opposition forces a dozen times in 2009. Hiraan and Hiraan-based TFG leaders in recent months have stepped up communication with the north Galgaduud faction of ASWJ (ref a). End note.) In addition, various clan and local efforts to militarily confront al-Shabaab in Galgaduud and Lower Juba appear to be gaining momentum against the backdrop of rifts within al-Shabaab (ref b). End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On January 10, a clan and ASWJ alliance attacked Beledweyne, the capital of Hiraan region, which had been under Hisbul Islam control since an early December HI defeat of TFG-forces there. (Note: The alliance comprises mostly Hawiye/Hawaadle sub-clan militia, largely sympathetic to the TFG. The Hawaadle militia has long fought against HI and AS in Hiraan and now appears willing to borrow the ASWJ name in order to receive logistical support from the powerful north Galgaduud Ayr-clan faction of ASWJ. In clan terms, this largely represents an alliance between the Hawaadle and Ayr subclans of the Hawiye. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) Sheikh Bashir Elmi, the Hawaadle spokesman in Hiraan, told us the alliance launched an early morning January 10 attack on HI positions at Beledweyne airstrip on the outskirts of the town. By late Sunday evening, following sporadic but fierce day-long fighting, the alliance had taken control of all of the town except for the western district of Howlwadag into which HI fighters had retreated. (Note: Howlwadag district is a predominantly Hawiye/Galje'el area. Many Galje'el have allied with al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam in order to resist perceived Hawaadle subclan domination of Beledweyne. The Hawaadle clan, larger than the Galje'el and generally better educated, dominates business in Beledweyne and has long-occupied the role of senior Hiraan clan. End Note.) As of January 11 the alliance reportedly retained control of most of Beledweyne.

¶4. (SBU) Contacts tell us that Hiraan leader Yusuf Ahmed Hagar "Dabageed" has taken up the mantle of chairman of the ASWJ security committee for Hiraan and has criticized the TFG for not providing

enough support to the region. (Note: "Dabageed" is from the Hawaadle clan and was formerly a Hiraan governor under then-President Abdullahi Yusuf. End note.)

¶5. (SBU) In addition, various clan and local efforts to militarily confront al-Shabaab in Galgaduud and Lower Juba appear to be gaining momentum against the backdrop of rifts within al-Shabaab (ref b). Overnight clashes on January 10 were reported in the Lower Juba border town of Dhobley after local clan militias attacked al-Shabaab positions. Our contacts tell us that al-Shabaab suffered significant losses. In addition, tension remains high in Galgaduud region following January 2 ASWJ-al-Shabaab clashes in Dhusamarebb. Our contacts tell us additional clashes are expected in the region as the two groups rearm.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: We think the apparent uptick in anti-Shabaab and anti-HI efforts is a positive development and is partially the result of and a contributing factor to internal opposition divisions. However, "Dabageed's" criticisms of the TFG's and ASWJ's apparent efforts to cast all anti-opposition efforts in Hiraan as

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its work, should serve as a cautionary tale to the TFG. We are encouraging the TFG to continue outreach to Hiraan and ASWJ and to hone its political messaging. We are also encouraging local and regional leaders to continue their efforts to politically and militarily confront al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam.
RANNEBERGER